

New Jersey Leadership for Educational Excellence



April 28, 2020

The Honorable Philip D. Murphy
Governor, State of New Jersey
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear Governor Murphy:

Leadership for Educational Excellence (LEE), a coalition of the state's major education organizations dedicated to the education and welfare of New Jersey students, urges you to keep Executive Order 107 in effect, as it applies to school closings, through the month of June—that is, for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

Our organizations, which represent all stakeholder groups in K-12 public education, are in complete agreement with the cautious, data-centered approach to reopening the state's businesses and services as reflected in "The Road Back: Restoring Economic Health Through Public Health," released on April 27. Considering the six principles/metrics in the plan and current data on the incidence of COVID-19, the LEE group does not believe that districts will be in the position to reopen during the current school year.

We are especially concerned about recent statements indicating that schools may still reopen this spring. It sends a mixed message to students, parents and educators and is at odds with the sound reasoning behind "The Road Back" blueprint.

Reopening schools presents serious challenges that are far more complex than even those involved in closing schools and moving to online instruction. These include, but are certainly not limited to, readjusting curriculum, designing remediation for students who may have fallen behind during the closure, and accommodating social distancing and other preventive measures in the classroom, in cafeterias and gymnasiums, on school buses, and during extra-curricular activities.

Above all else, parents, students and school staff must be assured that health will not be compromised when schools reopen. The current data do not indicate that we can provide such assurance if schools reopen in the spring.

Addressing these challenges will require thoughtful planning and must involve all segments of the education community. We are just beginning these conversations within LEE, with the NJDOE, with the State Legislature and, we hope, with your staff. Therefore, it is in the best interests of our students that the LEE organizations be involved in the establishment of criteria to reopen schools and in the state's plan to guide the process.

The leaders of the LEE organizations offer our expertise and perspective as New Jersey continues to face this public health emergency. We urge you to ensure that our member organizations are involved in state-level discussions of the reopening of schools. We would welcome a member of your education policy staff to join us at one of our weekly LEE meetings, held each Monday, to begin this discussion. It is only through a thoughtful, collaborative conversation on these complex issues that we will reach the best decision for New Jersey's students and the entire school community.

Thank you for your steadfast support of our schools, our students, and our educators.

Sincerely,

Michael R. McClure, President
Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod, Executive Director
NJ School Boards Association

Dr. Scott R. Rocco, President
Dr. Richard Bozza, Executive Director
NJ Association of School Administrators

Marie Blistan, President
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Susan Young, Executive Director
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Karen Bingert, President
Patricia Wright, Executive Director
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c.c.: Dr. Lamont Repollet